

# Indictment for fraud in obtaining disaster unemployment debit cards

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## US Fed News

BATON ROUGE, La., Jan. 20 -- The U.S. Department of Justice's U.S. Attorney's office for the Middle District of Louisiana issued the following press release:

United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced that DREWEY PIERRE WHITTAKER, age 44, formerly of Villa Rica, Georgia, was charged yesterday by a federal grand jury with five counts of wire fraud and eleven counts of illegal use of Social Security numbers, all alleged to have occurred in connection with his obtaining fifty-one disaster unemployment debit cards from the Louisiana Department of Labor for alleged unemployment loss due to Hurricane Katrina

The indictment alleges that, based upon applications filed with the Louisiana Department of Labor, fifty-one disaster unemployment debit cards were mailed to a post office box that WHITTAKER had rented in Villa Rica, Georgia. The indictment alleges that 49 of the 51 claims for unemployment assistance were for imaginary people, all had the same date of birth, all had the last name of Ramirez or Garcia, and all had similar Social Security numbers, except for one or two digits.

WHITTAKER was arrested in Albany, Georgia, on December 13, 2005, on a criminal complaint alleging similar violations. After a probable cause hearing on December 15, he was ordered by U.S. Magistrate Judge Richard L. Hodge of the Middle District of Georgia to be transported to Baton Rouge to face charges. WHITTAKER was transferred to Baton Rouge and is in the custody of the U.S. Marshal for the Middle District of Louisiana.

Each of the five wire fraud counts carries a maximum term of imprisonment of thirty years and a \$1 million fine. Each of the eleven illegal use of Social Security numbers counts carries a maximum term of imprisonment of five years and a \$250,000 fine. If convicted of all counts, the maximum term of imprisonment is 205 years and the maximum fine is \$7,750,000.

The total number of defendants who have been charged in the Middle District of Louisiana with violations related to FEMA relief funds stands at twenty-two.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division - includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission,

the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

The case is being investigated by Special Agents of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of **Inspector General**; the Social Security Administration, Office of **Inspector General**; the United States **Postal Service**; and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. U.S. Attorney Dugas acknowledged the U.S. Marshals Service for its assistance in apprehending WHITTAKER in Albany, Georgia, after he had fled from Villa Rica. Assistant U.S. Attorney Ian Hipwell is prosecuting the case in Baton Rouge.

For further information, contact David R. Dugas, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Louisiana, or Lyman Thornton, First Assistant U.S. Attorney, at (225) 389-0443.

NOTE: An indictment is merely an accusation by a grand jury, and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty at trial.